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AUTHOR Larsson, Yvonne
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ABSTRACT

Because of recent criticism of the use of standardized tests to identify gifted individuals, the focus for identification of gifted adolescents has shifted to acceptance of three interrelated aspects: (1) above average ability; (2) task commitment; and (3) creativity. It is now recognized that talented individuals will only do well in circumstances that encourage development of their talents and offer emotional support. Unfortunately, many misconceptions about the gifted and gifted education persist, and many adults have difficulty dealing with immaturity in gifted adolescents. Although evidence is growing that gifted adolescents are more likely than others to reach adulthood without emotional or psychological difficulties, there often arise problems such as intensified stress, peer pressure, and conflicts between talent and societal expectations (particularly with girls, who are expected to conform, and be neat and quiet). Also important, especially in Australia, is identification of a broad concept of giftedness, which would provide opportunities for girls, aborigines, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and poor and rural students. A number of projects are being undertaken in Australian states to reach, encourage, and support a wide variety of gifted students. A checklist used to identify gifted underachievers, a needs assessment questionnaire, and 48 references conclude the document. (SKC)

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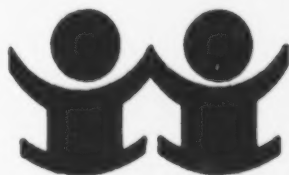
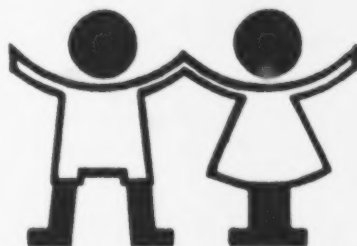
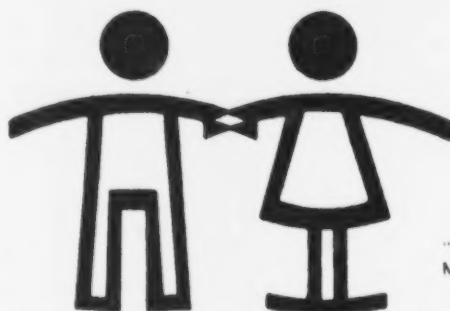
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Dr. Yvonne Larsson

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ON BEING A GIFTED ADOLESCENT

Dr. Yvonne Larsson

The University of Sydney

CHANGING IDEAS ON GIFTEDNESS

The acceptance of different kinds of talents as signs of excellence has changed over the years. Initially the concept of giftedness was strongly based on intelligence testing and the achievement of high intelligence scores and outstanding academic performance (Terman, 1925; Cox, 1926; Burks, Jensen and Terman, 1930). Later research, however, emphasised that highly creative students might not be identified by traditional I.Q. testing procedures (Getzels and Jackson, 1958). Nor did standardised tests of creativity necessarily identify truly creative children (Poole, Lett and Williams, 1978). By the 1980s the generally accepted concept of giftedness was a multi-faceted one. This is the pattern of change that has gained general acknowledgement. Yet recognition of a multiplicity of talents as a definition of giftedness was actually perceived by some researchers as early as the 1920s (Hollingworth, 1926) and reinforced in the 1950s (De Hahn and Havighurst, 1957; Witty, 1958).

The cautioning against identification of giftedness in terms of I.Q. has shifted the focus to acceptance of three interrelated aspects: above average ability, task commitment and creativity (Renzulli, 1978). In this context giftedness involves the personality of the individual including interests, motives, persistence and diligence. More recently, however, recognition has been given to the fact that conforming adolescents are frequently identified by their teachers as gifted (Busse, Dahme, Wagner and Wiecekowsky, 1986). There are obvious dangers in this and it points to the necessity for teachers to be trained in identification procedures. Recognition has now been given to the idea that exceptional potential only realises itself in the form of outstanding performance if a number of conditions such as motivation, concentration, and persistence come together in "a favourable constellation of facilitating factors" (Gallagher, 1986).

In order to help create a favourable school environment for desirable learning and behavioural patterns to occur, the "Revolving Door" model was proposed and adopted in many schools in the United States of America (Renzulli, Keis and Smith, 1981). In practice, the model means the offering of programmes when task commitment is high and to "revolve" youth out of these special experiences when a task activity and task commitment subsides. Such a model offers gifted youth the opportunity to explore and clarify their conceptions of their own abilities and interests. It may also help them become aware of appropriate higher level career opportunities.

Hopefully in such situations there emerges a conception of self which perceives high level accomplishment as possible (Bloom, 1982). Nevertheless motivation is not in itself enough; such programmes must include a substantial amount of higher level cognitive experience such as problem solving, inquiry, discovery, experimentation, research, and independent study. One of the factors identified as contributing to talent development is for the adolescent to be constantly confronted with new ideas which are challenging to the individual's talent (Gallagher, 1986). Under-stimulation can lead to lack of interest in school, loss of motivation, unwillingness to make the necessary effort, behavioural disturbances or failure. Furthermore, if the young person's self-confidence is shaken by criticism or peer disapproval of intellectual activities, then potentiality may not be realised. This becomes a particularly accentuated problem should the teenager, already vulnerable, be continually exposed to non-acceptance by peers. It is a shattering experience in adolescence and can lead to severe depression (See Table 1).

Highly gifted adolescents need a lot of emotional support and help to achieve autonomy especially in dealing with such concerns as finding their identity and their contribution to society. Assistance should be given also to help adolescents achieve self-assurance, perseverance, presentation of self, and receptiveness to social phenomena. There is no doubt that gifted achievement or productivity is potentially influenced in many ways by the social, intellectual, and physical environment which impinges on the individual (Tannenbaum, 1983). Self-conception and self-esteem are probably major influences which impel an individual to work, to investigate, to learn, to solve problems, to strive to achieve, and to compete as well as to co-operate. Recently self-concept and self-esteem have been viewed as correlated conditions which when accompanied by other psychological conditions in the individual and external facilitating factors, may give rise to gifted and/or talented behaviour (Feldhusen, 1986). What must be remembered too is that although the gifted teenager does have the structure and intellect of an adult, the adolescent lacks the wisdom of historical perspective and adult experiences (Sellin and Birch, 1980).

PERSISTING MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT GIFTED ADOLESCENTS

Despite more recognition given to gifted youth and increasing research being undertaken particularly in the United States of America, persisting misconceptions remain. Because of the continuation of these misconceptions, they are listed here for consideration and hopefully eradication. They are as follows:

1. *Gifted youngsters survive well despite their schooling.*

The answer is that about half of the nation's talented youth do not complete tertiary education.

2. *Enrichment is the way of educating the gifted.*

The answer is that enrichment by teachers untrained in dealing with the gifted is a poor substitute for programmes run by specialists.

3. *Any segregated education produces an elite group.*

The answer is that there is no evidence of elitism amongst gifted pupils; they are usually socially conscious young people.

4. *The challenging minds of the gifted provides motivation for other pupils; hence, the most acceptable form of classroom organisation is the mixed ability grouping.*

This argument is used by those supporting mixed ability but alternative research evidence supports flexible instructional grouping for both gifted and talented and for other children (Sellin and Birch, 1980).

5. *Early gifted education programmes are not justified because of the "late bloomers" who do not show up their talents until their late teens.*

The answer is that although there are some late developers (Marjoram, 1986) the vast majority can be really identified quite early, four out of five, in fact, by the age of three or four. These children exhibit early intellectual precocity, astute observations, heightened sensitivity and verbal fluency (Geker and Dick, 1986).

6. *It is unwise to deprive children of a happy, normal childhood.*

The response is that the best assurance of normal and happy development for a highly able youngster is for a stimulating education planned and paced with good counselling and guidance for children and parents (Reynolds and Birch, 1977; Hallahan and Kauffman, 1978).

7. *Gifted adolescents are more likely to suffer emotional and behavioural disorders.*

The findings show that there is a lower prevalence of conduct disorders in the highly intelligent. This is possibly due to a more mature moral development (Terman and Oden, 1959) or ability to use different cognitive strategies.

The positive aspects of adolescent behaviour in relation to their immediate tasks are intellectualism, reflection, altruism, and idealism (Sellin and Birch, 1980). Unfortunately some adults view exploratory adolescent preferences as deliberate attacks upon adult standards. Certainly adolescents will have lapses into immaturity; at such times they need reminders, not panic or stress responses. There should be defined policies formulated by both parents and teachers to allow teenagers to be of service. Above all, it must be remembered that responsibility and maturity are learned behaviours, usually copied from models. The best models are provided by adults who are willing to be responsible for their own behaviour and who are mature and resourceful in the face of adversity. There should also be manifested by adults, a code of fairness and justice. Where gifted, severely disturbed children have been found, they often come from families that are either rigid, closed units - or excessively diffused, loosely structured units (Dencen - Gerber, 1973). In contrast bright achiever's families have been characterised as communicative, sharing of activities, approving, trusting, affectionate and nonsevere (Gowan, 1957; Morrow and Wilson, 1961). Furthermore, the achieving adolescent seems to reciprocate parental approval by accepting the parents' standards (Morrow and Wilson, 1961).

GIFTED ADOLESCENT PROBLEMS

Despite evidence showing that gifted teenagers are more likely to survive the stresses and strains of growing up and reaching adulthood in a complex society without psychological disorders, there are some for whom stress is more intense. There are several reasons for this:

1. The gifted adolescents' broadened awareness and sensitivity exposes them to potentially intensified stress reactions (Painter, 1984).
2. They often do not have the resources necessary for controlling or modifying their environment, which is frequently a major stress source.
3. They are developing facets of personality and socialisation concurrently with a typically early developmental search for identity.
4. The stress may also be increased by tendencies towards perfection. This in itself carries a very high potential for social and emotional conflict, which leads to added stress. Most people do not want to be challenged, organised or corrected by young idealists (Kline and Meckstroth, 1985).
5. They may find it very difficult to cope with the peer group pressures for conformity. These pressures may cause the gifted adolescent to behave in an erratic, irritable and aggressive manner (Painter, 1984).

Where psychological stress does exist it may manifest itself in the adolescent talking about being useless or hopeless. There may be sleep problems and general lack of ability to have fun and get pleasure out of the usual teenage activities. Psychological stress may also bring about such medical conditions as migraine, peptic ulcer, asthma and diabetes mellitus (Waters, 1987). Evidence has also been found of an overrepresentation of highly intelligent individuals among girls suffering from anorexia nervosa. Some researchers view anorexia as a rejection of the female role. The reason given is that highly intelligent girls generally meet with less understanding than do highly intelligent boys (Warren and Heist, 1959); Terman and Oden, 1959; Crisp, 1984). However, clinical experience indicates that conflict with developing womanhood is apparent in only some patients and there is no basis for generalisation (Smart et al, 1976; Pierloot et al, 1975; Garfinkel and Garner, 1982). Nevertheless, research conducted at the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinic at Mennheim Central Institute, Germany in the period 1978 to 1985 showed that highly intelligent girls between 12 and 15 years of age were especially vulnerable to the development of anorexia nervosa of the type called "restrictive dieters" (Detzner and Schmidt, 1986). Parents of anorexic girls often reported they were ideal children. Therefore, too much was often demanded of them in the home situation, such as having to take over parental roles or having to choose sides in parental conflicts (Powers, 1984).

The expectation of conformity of behaviour in girls is widespread. There is a danger, for example, that in the teaching of girls in secondary schools there is an emphasis placed on neatness and the enjoyment of reading rather than on thinking abilities (Boyd, 1986). The rewarding of girls for regurgitating what they have read or heard is a stultifying practice and probably reinforces girls' general lack of confidence (Leder, 1986). In the teaching of Mathematics for example, it is particularly important for that subject to be perceived as a sex-neutral rather than a male domain. Where parents and teachers also foster the usefulness of mathematics and effective motivation such as the joy in problem solving, girls would gain increasing confidence (Sherman, 1980). Those who are outstanding in mathematics at school, however, are usually fortunate, not only because teachers recognise their talents relatively easily, but also because the school curriculum features mathematics among its major subjects.

Even if pupils' playwriting or potential skills were as recognisable as were their potential in mathematics, there would be no comparison in the amount of educational opportunities offered at school in these disciplines. The conventional classroom does not stress drama or social leadership enough to provide special stimulation for children who could benefit most from it. Training in leadership may also be particularly helpful to the gifted adolescent. That offered recently by Metropolitan East Region of the New South Wales Department of Education was encouraging in the activities presented which helped pupils learn the skills involved in communication and decision making (Wentworth Courier, 10 June, 1987).

The need to consider a broader concept of giftedness has also encouraged researchers to consider disadvantaged groups in our society namely, girls, aborigines, students from non-English speaking backgrounds, those from low income families, the disabled and the isolated (Braggett, 1982(a)). The persistent problem is that teachers do not often give these pupils the special assistance which they require. Changes in attitude are obviously very important.

In Australia, a wide range of approaches are currently being considered and implemented in secondary schools. A comprehensive survey undertaken in the last few years analyses the policies of each state and territory (Braggett, 1985(b)). It suffices in this paper to look briefly at a few projects that appear to be working. Firstly, in Victoria, under the auspices of the Victorian Gifted Children Task Force (created 1977) an acceleration project was initiated at University High School in Melbourne where, selected academically, gifted children would be permitted to complete their secondary schooling in four years instead of six. This acceleration project began in 1981. Pupil selection was based on high general intellectual ability, academic attitude, high motivation, and social and emotional adjustment. The curriculum was a totally new one designed to broaden the base of learning and to ensure learning effectiveness. Emphasis was placed on the development and extension of higher-order mental processes so that pupils could work "as effective independent thinkers" (Gifted Children's Task Force, 1984).

Those who opted for the Higher School Certificate examination were very successful and many enrolled in tertiary institutes. The experimental programme has been evaluated as a successful one. The early displays of competitiveness virtually disappeared in favour of a co-operative learning environment and the accelerated pupils had no difficulty in forming friendships with Year 12 pupils who have followed the traditional programme of six years preparation for the Higher School Certificate.

At Wesley College in Melbourne the Renzulli "Revolving Door" process was adopted in 1984 and children identified with high ratings in creativity, measured intelligence and task commitment or motivation were withdrawn from regular classes and allowed to pursue a different subject of study each term with a specialist teacher (Wenn, 1985). This process has proved more successful than such techniques as creative problem solving, scenario writing, sociodrama, simulation methods and brain storming which were tried with the brighter pupils at the College in 1979 (Croome, 1979). The reason for the withdrawal of that programme was that the material was too abstract for the pupils involved. In St. Leonard's College, the International Baccalaureate is offered in Years 11 and 12 for gifted and talented pupils. In order to be successful in this examination, which would allow for entrance to most overseas universities, the candidates must study a language other than their native tongue.

Western Australia of all the states, however, has embarked upon a varied specialist programme. Some specialise in Art (Applecross, Balcatta and Kalmunda Senior High Schools), whilst others concentrate on Languages (Mt. Lawley, Rossmoyne and Scarborough), Music (Churchlands and Perth Modern), and Dance and/or Theatre Arts (Balcatta, Girrawheen and John Curtin). There are other schools that cater specifically for the intellectually talented (Applecross, Belmont, Duncraig, Governor Stirling, Hollywood, Kelmscott, Mr. Lawley Swanbourne and South Fremantle). The provision for excellence in the Secondary School Placement Programmes (S.S.P.P.) was designed to arrest the drift to independent schools (Honeyman, 1984). Exceptional pupils at Kelmscott, identified at the end of Year 8, are permitted to follow an individual private study plan in addition to their usual work. If maturity allows, pupils may advance to Year 11 at the end of Year 9. Those who attend the other specialist schools are expected to work long hours, weekends, attend camps and to perform at a high level. The continuation of all specialist programmes is justified on the basis of the increased status and prestige enjoyed by the government schools and the curtailment of the loss of talented pupils to the independent sector (Jenkins and Tuettemann, 1984).

There are no plans envisaged for such extensive radical changes in New South Wales. Rather the approach taken in the government sector has been for such regional initiatives as camps and seminars and the involvement of students in out-of-school enrichment activities and competitions. Schools have been encouraged to develop their own initiatives and in 1987 it has become mandatory for all schools to implement a policy for *The Education of Children with Special Talents*. The result has been a range of initiatives but probably the most usual has been greater emphasis placed on extension work in teachers' programmes. Many teachers are for the first time aware that they should be making provision for individual differences in their classes.

Where secondary schools had devised programmes for talented students, before the 1987 mandatory implementation, an improvement in "top end" results in the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate were noted as a result of Talented Education programmes. However, teacher attitudes remain a problem to widespread effective implementation. In a report of the District Inspectors' Survey, Inspectors commented on the lack of understanding of the true intent of the gifted and talented policy and lack of familiarity with support documents and other literature produced by Head Office Directorates. Teachers also expressed reservations in terms of the promotion of elitism. As a consequence some schools were still basically catering for the talented in sport rather than seeing the trial spectrum. Lack of consultancy support and inservice provisions continued as obstacles to overall satisfactory implementation (Eales, 1987).

Gifted adolescents certainly have the right to educational provision and parents should give serious consideration to the sort of education they would like to see implemented (See Table II). What they should ensure is that a programme for gifted adolescents should provide a comprehensively planned curriculum that utilises current disciplines and/or cross-disciplinary courses. These courses should allow for both vertical (acceleration) and horizontal (breadth and depth in a topic) movement that is educationally relevant. The programme should stress higher-level thinking skills such as inquiring skills, problem solving, and creative thinking. In addition, development of self-direction, risk-taking, imagination, curiosity, and interpersonal relations should be emphasised. The framework for the programme should allow for individual projects and peer-group interaction. Unless the school system satisfactorily caters for the gifted adolescent, there is the possibility that the gifted person will not accomplish self-fulfilment nor develop a sense of responsibility to self, school and society (Davis and Rimm, 1985). A continuation of disdain for academic accomplishment can lead to underachievement or "mentally dropping out". Schools should also offer effective counselling services and help adolescents learn alternative coping strategies, such as: recognising that they cannot be outstanding in everything; valuing their compensating outstanding achievements; and doing their best regardless of the competitive ranking. After all these gifted adolescents' talents should be nurtured for their contribution to society, both nationally and internationally.

TABLE I : A CHECKLIST TO IDENTIFY GIFTED UNDERACHIEVERS

If the pupil displays ten or more of the listed characteristics, including all that are asterisked, over a period of several weeks, the pupil may be a gifted underachiever. Counselling and individual intelligence testing, e.g. WISC-R, is recommended.

- * poor test performance
- * daily work frequently incomplete or poorly done
- * superior comprehension and retention of concepts when interested
- * vast gap between quality of oral and written work
- * exceptionally large range of general knowledge
- vitality of imagination, creative
- persistent dissatisfaction with work accomplished, even in art
- evidence of perfectionism, self-criticism
- * has a wide range of interests and possibly special "expertise" in an area of investigation and research
- * evidences low self-esteem in tendencies to withdraw or be aggressive in the classroom
- does not function comfortably or constructively in a group of any size
- shows acute sensitivity and perceptions to self, others, and life in general
- tends to set unrealistic self-expectations; goals too high or too low
- dislikes drill for memorisation and mastery learning
- easily distracted, unable to focus attention and concentrate efforts on tasks
- has an indifferent or negative attitude toward school
- resists teacher efforts to motivate or discipline behaviour in class
- * has difficulty in peer relationships; maintains few friendships
- * displays untidiness and lack of organisation.

Adapted from Joanne Whitmore, *Giftedness, Conflict, and Underachievement* (Rockleigh, N.J. Allyn & Bacon, 1980).

Modifications have been made in the light of experience with gifted adolescent underachievers in the Australian context.

TABLE II : NEEDS-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Please rate the statements below in two ways. The first rating relates to the strength of a particular programme as you perceive it in the school. The second rating refers to the way in which you think the programme should be. Programme need will be determined by subtracting Rating 1 from Rating 2. Programmes that are presently weak but are determined to be important preferences will be set as first priorities.

Rate 1 if you STRONGLY DISAGREE with the statement

Rate 2 if you DISAGREE SOMEWHAT with the statement

Rate 3 if you are UNDECIDED

Rate 4 if you AGREE SOMEWHAT with the statement

Rate 5 if you STRONGLY AGREE with the statement.

	NOW	FUTURE
1. In general, the needs of gifted children in your area are being met.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2. The attitude of most teachers toward the gifted pupil is positive and helpful.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
3. The programme provides individualisation of curriculum for gifted pupils.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
4. Special enrichment opportunities are provided for gifted pupils.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
5. Classes that teach creative and critical thinking are available.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
6. The school has appropriate guidelines for determining grade skipping or acceleration.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
7. The school provides for the needs of the underachieving gifted child.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
8. The special social-emotional needs of gifted children are being addressed.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
9. The special needs of the highly creative child are being met.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
10. The school provides for the needs of gifted and talented girls.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

TABLE II : NEEDS-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE (CONTINUED)

	NOW	FUTURE
11. The school provides for the needs of gifted and talented minority children.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
12. The school includes parents in the planning and guiding of gifted and talented children.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
13. In-service education opportunities in the area of gifted and talented are provided for the teaching staff.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
14. The administration supports education of the gifted and talented.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

Adapted from: G.A. Davis and S.B. Rimm (1985) *Education of the Gifted and Talented*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, p.42.

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